



Community Development Programs

Desert Communities (Riverside County) Empowerment Zone (EZ)

The Desert Communities EZ is bordered on the north by the Riverside-San Bernardino County line; on the east by the Colorado River; on the south by the Riverside-Imperial County line; and on the west by the cities of Coachella, Indio, La Quinta, and Desert Hot Springs. The EZ includes four incorporated cities, five Indian Reservations, and the three Colonia communities of Ripley, Mesa Verde, and Oasis.

Communities and residents within the EZ, including Indian reservation lands, are affected by pervasive rates of poverty (31.4%) and general distress evidenced by unemployment (21.3%) and under-employment, substandard housing, low educational attainment and high rates of crime. The need for a specific effort such as the Empowerment Zone is critical if the residents of the area are to have a chance for a brighter future. Included in the Desert Communities EZ Strategic Plan are:

- Efforts to increase affordable housing programs including self-help housing projects, migrant farmworker housing construction, new mobile home parks, and increase code enforcement for new and existing housing.
- Creation of employment opportunities, promotion of business expansion and entrepreneurship with micro business loans and technical assistance.
- Construction of new school buildings, utilization of bookmobiles to reach unserved areas.
- Mobile medical clinics and construction of permanent medical clinics.
- Clean drinking water projects, safe sewage disposal systems, established bus services and increased fire fighting, paramedic, and public safety services.
- Construction of three multi-purpose community centers and creation of programs to facilitate volunteer community-building activities.

Already the EZ has seen benefits of designation including:

- A \$250,700 Rural Utilities Service Colonia grant to provide a safe and sanitary water supply to the communities of Middleton Road and 100 Palms Trailer Park.
- A \$900,000 Rural Utilities Service combination loan and grant to fund repairs and upgrade the Mission Spring Water District's delivery system.
- A \$45,000 Rural Business Enterprise Grant to establish a revolving loan fund program for micro- and standard-sized enterprises.

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Jeff Hays, Executive Director

Desert Communities Empowerment Zone

53-990 Enterprise Way, Suite 1

Coachella, CA 92236

Phone: (760) 391-5050 Fax: (760) 760-391-5100 Email: jeff@dcez.org